

Sociologist examines effects on migrants of raising families in two countries

June 11 2014, by Bettye Miller

For generations, immigrants from the Mexican town of Jalostotitlán, Jalisco, have migrated between their native community—which they call "Jalos"—and Turlock in California's Central Valley.

A new book by University of California, Riverside sociologist Alfredo Mirandé, "Jalos USA: Transnational Community and Identity" (University of Notre Dame Press), examines this circular pattern of migration and how the ability of these migrants to stay connected to their native roots facilitates success in the United States.

Mirandé made numerous trips to Turlock and Jalostotitlán beginning in 2006 to observe and interview migrants who identify themselves as "being from Jalos." Among others, he interviewed youth in Jalos and Turlock, as well as priests and social service providers.

He examined courtship, family, gender, and culture of this community and their impact on identity that transcends both the border and traditional national identities. He also identified an emerging ideology he calls "El Que Quiere, Puede" ("Those Who Want, Can"), which inspires Jalos residents to pursue a Mexican version of the American Dream and asserts that those who are motivated and hard-working can succeed in the U.S.

" 'Being from Jalos,' regardless of one's place of birth or [immigration status](#), is facilitated by biannual religious fiestas that reinforce identification with a global transnational community," explained

Mirandé, who teaches in the sociology and ethnic studies departments at UC Riverside. "Religious-based fiestas bring residents back to the community on pilgrimages that serve not only to promote a transnational Jalos identity but also as a dating and marriage market for young people."

His study also focuses on the role religion has played in a strongly Catholic region of Mexico that has a turbulent past and was at the center of the Cristero War, a counter-revolution against the anti-cleric policies of the ruling Mexican government in the 1920s and 1930s. He also examined the community's veneration of and devotion to Toribio Romo, a young priest and Cristero War martyr from Jalos, popularly known as El Padre Pollero, or the patron saint of undocumented migrants.

"While most studies of migration have looked at transnational migration among indigenous communities in México and Central America, this study focuses on a less indigenous community," the researcher said. Mirandé proposes that "while people from Jalos may be 'light' and derive certain privileges because of their phenotype or lighter skin tone, they are certainly not accepted as 'white' in the United States." He develops a new theory of discrimination based not only on race but on language and real or perceived immigration status.

Community studies have a long history in modern Mexican research, said Diego Vigil, professor emeritus of criminology, law and society at UC Irvine. "The study of international migration today requires that we look at the binational, bilingual, and bicultural nature of the movement of large bodies of people," he said. "Mirandé adds a new theoretical perspective when he also examines the bi-community effects of living and raising families in two countries."

Provided by University of California - Riverside

Citation: Sociologist examines effects on migrants of raising families in two countries (2014, June 11) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-sociologist-effects-migrants-families-countries.html>

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